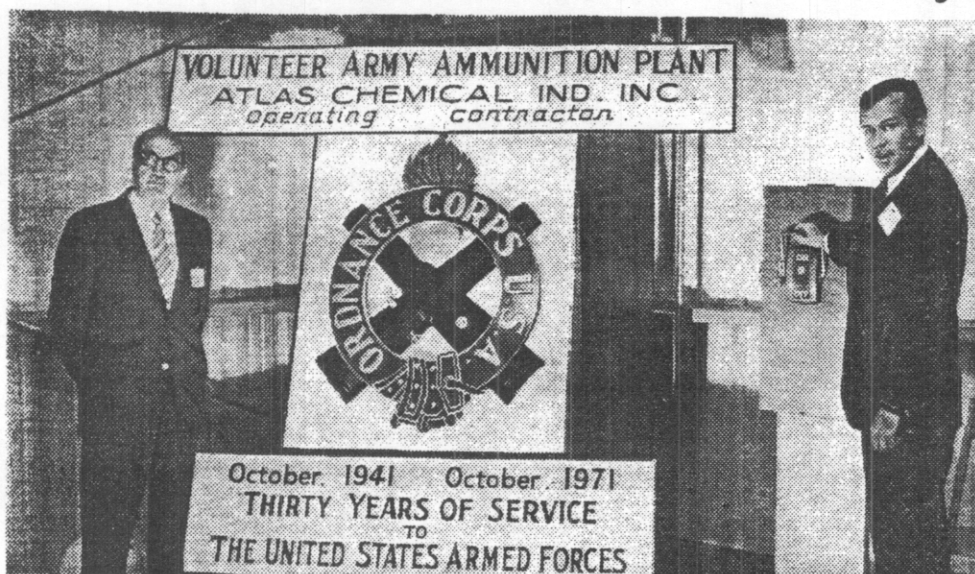


TNT Plant Marks 30th Anniversary

CLIPPING FILE
HISTORICAL COLLECTION
CHATTANOOGA PUBLIC LIBRARY



—Times Staff Photo by George Baker.

HAMILTON WATCHES AS BAKER THROWS SUBSTATION SWITCH

By BILL CASTEEL

The Volunteer Army Ammunition Plant turned 30 Friday and celebrated the anniversary by energizing a new K. V. substation, part of a \$140 million modernization program at the facility.

Sen. Howard Baker threw the switch to put the substation into service after praising plant officials and employees for working to become good neighbors in the community. He also assured the employees in the audience that the facility is to be permanent.

Baker noted that the federal government's decision to spend many millions of dollars to modernize the plant indicates that "it's here to stay."

VAAP, established in 1941 as Volunteer Ordnance Works, has served the U.S. in three wars, becoming the free world's largest producer of TNT.

In 1969 the Army authorized the modernization of the plant to eliminate all water pollution, at least 70 per cent of the air pollution and to produce TNT at a reduced cost. The total cost of the program will be some \$140 million. More than \$40 million is being spent on the initial phase of the program.

Friday's celebration developed into a grand outing for VAAP people, railroad lovers and politicians.

VAAP, of course, got most of the spotlight as the new facilities were shown off during the anniversary ceremonies and on tours of the plant.

But both Southern Railway officials and officials of the Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum also got into the act. A steam engine train carried visitors from the Southern station to VAAP.

The passenger cars were filled with representatives of the railroad and the museum, many mourning the passing of the steam engine.

First Time for Some

A few of the passengers were riding the rails for the first time. One was Wanda Smith, a secretary in Rep. LaMar Baker's office here. Others confessed to having not ridden a train in many years.

Both of the lawmaking Bakers were flown here on a Southern Railway jet. Southern officials joyfully announced that their train made it to the rendezvous point several minutes ahead of the plane passengers.

Birthday parties are supposed to be fun and this one was just that. The official ceremony was brief and the speeches short.

Lt. Col. Deryl A. Sisson, commanding officer at VAAP, was master of ceremonies. He introduced Rep. Baker as a friend of the plant. Rep. Baker introduced Sen. Baker, noting that he too had long fought for funds at VAAP. And Sen. Baker told the crowd that their "native son," Sen. Bill Brock, worked harder than anyone "in bringing about these improvements."

The senator called Friday's event one of "substantial importance to Chattanooga and the nation." He praised the over-all effort being made at VAAP to clean up the air and water, adding: "No area of the country has a greater potential or greater people than this area and it's fitting that such a plant be located here."

Except for brief comments by Sisson, VAAP officials let others do the talking. Plant manager Norl Hamilton was a platform guest but remained silent.

Visitors Get Tour

After Sen. Baker threw the switch for real one time and for photographers several times, he and his party departed. Visitors were given a short tour of the modernization area of the plant and then ate at the plant cafeteria.

The plant was constructed in an isolated area of Hamilton County on some 8,200 acres of sub-standard farmland consisting of forested ridges and rolling lowlands. The acreage now has been reduced to about 7,300 acres.

Original cost of land and construction came to approximately \$56 million. Sixteen TNT lines were constructed along with three acid areas. Only 12 of the lines were ever operated at one time and six of them were later dismantled. Farmers Chemical Association now operates one of the original acid areas as a fertilizer producing facility. Another is operated as acid producer for the TNT operation; the third was dismantled and sold.

Atlas Chemical Industries Inc. was granted a contract to reactivate and operate the plant for both the Korean War and the Vietnam War. During the present operation — longest of all the three operating periods — the plant has produced a total of 1.4 billion pounds of TNT, a major portion of the explosives used in the Vietnam War.

Since 1965, the plant has purchased a total of \$106 million in materials, a good portion of it from local business firms. During this time, \$82.2 million has been paid in salaries. In the Korean operation, \$12.9 million was paid out in salaries; \$27 million was expended in rehabilitating the plant for its current operation; \$57 million was the cost of original land and facilities.

A program now underway at the plant will completely modernize the facilities, making them the most technologically advanced in the free world. Initial projects in the program, to cost some \$50 million are already underway. They consist of acid producing facilities and three new TNT Lines. Plans call for constructing seven more of these continuous process lines together with support facilities. Total cost of the program is estimated at \$140 million.